

Message

From: Stepp, Cathy [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=BEFDAFC0FA1A425EAE232F60AD9BDA1D-STEPP, CATH]
Sent: 2/21/2018 8:50:54 PM
To: Edward Chu (Chu.Ed@epa.gov) [Chu.Ed@epa.gov]
CC: thiede.kurt@epa.gov
Subject: FW: Follow-up to our meeting

Cathy Stepp

From: Mikulka, Michael
Sent: Wednesday, February 21, 2018 2:36 PM
To: Stepp, Cathy <stepp.cathy@epa.gov>
Cc: Larry, Danita <larry.danita@epa.gov>; Fusinski, Keith <fusinski.keith@epa.gov>; Cantello, Nicole <cantello.nicole@epa.gov>; Mangino, Mario <mangino.mario@epa.gov>; Simon, Verneta <simon.verneta@epa.gov>; Crisp, Ethel <crisp.ethel@epa.gov>
Subject: RE: Follow-up to our meeting

Regional Administrator Stepp:

At our meeting of January 23, 2018, you asked me for feedback from the Union on critical hires for the Region. I provided that feedback to you on February 1, 2018. I have not had any feedback from you as to what hiring actions you have requested, and which have been authorized.

Can I get some feedback please? Thank you.

Mike Mikulka, President
 AFGE Local 704
 312-886-6760

From: Mikulka, Michael
Sent: Thursday, February 01, 2018 4:25 PM
To: Stepp, Cathy <stepp.cathy@epa.gov>
Cc: Larry, Danita <larry.danita@epa.gov>; Fusinski, Keith <fusinski.keith@epa.gov>; Cantello, Nicole <cantello.nicole@epa.gov>; Mangino, Mario <mangino.mario@epa.gov>; Simon, Verneta <simon.verneta@epa.gov>; Crisp, Ethel <crisp.ethel@epa.gov>
Subject: Follow-up to our meeting

Regional Administrator Stepp:

This e-mail is a follow-up to our meeting of January 23, 2018. One item we discussed, and you asked for the Union input on, was critical staffing needs for the Region. The items below identifies what we believe are critical hiring needs for the Region, based on current information available. We have identified some rationale, as appropriate. There may be other critical staffing needs we are not aware of at this time; that does not mean they do not exist.

If you have any questions, or would like to discuss further, please contact me.

Michael Mikulka, President
 AFGE Local 704

312-886-6760

Critical Region 5 Staffing Needs

In general, the Region is short of Administrative Professionals. Due to the shortage, professional staff are required to perform administrative tasks that would be more efficiently and cost-effectively performed by administrative professionals. Most Branches in the Region have 1 administrative professional, meaning that any absences have to be covered by administrative staff from other Branches, or done by professional staff. The Region needs a comprehensive plan to correct these shortages.

Air & Radiation Division

2 or more Administrative Professionals. Support staff in ARD has always had limited resources to be a critical position within the Division. For example, Air Enforcement just lost an FTE (Chynna Hamilton) in December that left only 2 administrative staff employees (one being hearing impaired) for the entire branch of 50 employees. If one is absent, there's pressure on the one who is in the office to continue to support the entire branch. When the Division was requested who to keep as part of the intern program, all of the technical new interns were retained while Chynna (administrative) was let go.

1 Environmental Scientist for air monitoring, to replace an employee who left last summer. This is complex work that needs an experienced scientist to design and implement air monitoring to support enforcement and other critical monitoring work.

Land & Chemicals Division

1-2 Hydrogeologists – the Remediation and Reuse Branch has a need for 1-2 additional hydrogeologists to support the RCRA Corrective Action work effort. The amount of work is too much for existing staff to support. Key impetus is getting sites ready for anticipated use.

1 Community Involvement Coordinator – the Remediation and Reuse Branch has a need for an additional community involvement coordinator to support the RCRA Corrective Action work effort. The amount of work is too much for one existing staff at the Division level to support.

1 RCRA Info Staff – the only staff person working on RCRA Info retired and there is a need to hire one staff to do this work.

1 or more administrative professionals. See rationale above.

Superfund Division

2 - OSCs – Currently have 36, authorized 38. Of the 36, 4 are eligible for retirement. OSCs are exempt from the hiring freeze, but Superfund needs approval to hire. It takes 3 years for an OSC to become fully training and ready to deploy to emergencies and national responses. Hiring should be targeted to southern IL and Green Bay, WI.

4 Enforcement Specialists (ES) – Currently have 6, with 3 eligible for retirement. These employees support both Removal and Remedial. The oil enforcement position is currently vacant. Historically, ES has had 8-10 with additional SEE support. Enforcement is vital to finding PRPs and preserving tax dollars. Positions should be outside hire GS-7 with ladder to GS-12. Strong researching and writing skills, as well as the ability to work on teams and multi task.

2 - Civil Investigators – Currently have 0. CIs are critical in track PRPs, conduct interviews, and research legal documents. At least 2 should be hired.

1 - Toxicologist – We had 5 supporting the Regional Superfund effort years ago, including a GS-14 non-supervisor Senior Science Adviser. Currently SFD is down to 2, with only one capable of supporting the entire Superfund division. The other is eligible for retirement.

1-2 Hydrogeologists – the Superfund Division has 0 hydrogeologists to support the remedial work effort. Staff need to be hired to do this work rather than paying outside contractors.

Office of Regional Counsel

2 or more Administrative Professionals. There are little to no support staff in the Office. Several support staff and paralegals were dispatched as part of the buyout. These leaves some clerical functions to be done by attorneys, a waste of government resources. Additional support staff should be hired to support the office. Two more support staff have announced plans to leave this year.

1 Paralegal – two paralegals left last year and 1 more may leave this year. At least one should be hired.

1 Attorney. For attorneys, the office is losing one of its new hires and a senior attorney is leaving in April. ORC lost 3 attorneys last year. At least one more should be hired.

Resources Management Division

3 - 4 Chemists – the Chicago Regional Laboratory has been depleted of capable staff over the years, with a loss of 5 positions, and only 2 new staff recently hired. Chemists should be hired for both organic and inorganic work. There is also a need for a QA coordinator for the laboratory, and additional staff for drinking water certification in support of the Region.

Water Division

2-3 Administrative Professionals (AP) – there is a severe shortage of APs, so having APs managing two branches is commonplace. This is not feasible, each branch needs to have an AP. Technical staff are having to spend time doing AP work and most times we're just not efficient or effective at doing it and it takes away from their primary duties.

1 - FOIA coordinator – The Water Division FOIA Coordinator just retired and held a wealth of knowledge. The Administrative Professionals are being asked to take on a lot related to FOIA and FOIA is very particular and changes all the time.

1 Environmental Engineer - to provide technical support to States and municipalities on implementation of the drinking water lead and copper rule

1 Environmental Engineer to conduct enforcement for drinking water

1 Environmental Engineer – to write permits and conduct enforcement for underground injection control

1 Agricultural Engineer or Scientist to permit and evaluate Confined Animal Feeding Operations

Most branches are operating at bare minimums in terms of staff. Losing anyone else would put additional hurt on us, but folks are likely managing because we have no other choice. Management believes they can make do by increasing the workload on existing staff. This is simply creating more stress on staff.

Great Lakes National Program Office

Although a small office, a large amount of grant and construction money is allocated to the program. Five staff have left recently, and more senior staff are expected to retire in 2018. There is a need for backfilling:

1 grants project officer – a large amount of work is management of grants to support Great Lakes restoration.

1 Environmental Scientist: staff are needed to backfill loss of 2 staff in monitoring.

2 Environmental Engineers: GLNPO does not have enough experienced project managers to perform the work required to meet EPA AOC delisting goals established in the GLRI Action Plan 2 (2014-18) and Action Plan 3 (2018-22 currently under development). GLNPO has Legacy Act project applications from non-federal partners and does not have the capacity to manage or perform the work. Some current projects do not have a back-up (project manager) and no team for support.